

OL

OPEN LINES

BROKEN
HEALS

PHILIPAS

FINDING *the* STRENGTH *to* FIGHT

03

Open Enrollment, Oct. 12–31

UF Health Jacksonville employees can now make 2023 benefits elections.

04

COVER STORY

A young pharmacy student undergoes breast cancer treatment during the pandemic.

06

Breast Cancer Research

A look at the ongoing disparities in breast cancer patient outcomes.

THINKING PINK FOR BREAST CANCER

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, an annual international campaign to raise awareness about the impact of breast cancer. This month is devoted to breast cancer education and fundraising to support medical advancements and treatments. Inside this issue, we are highlighting an inspirational patient story, research on breast cancer patient outcomes and several upcoming events.

Mark your calendars! The UF Health Breast Center – Jacksonville is hosting educational events and an annual mammogram day. I also encourage you to sign up for the American Cancer Society’s annual walk, Making Strides of the First Coast. Get ready to lace up your sneakers to support the fight against breast cancer. You can learn more about these events on page 3 and read more details on the Bridge. I hope you’ll find time to participate.

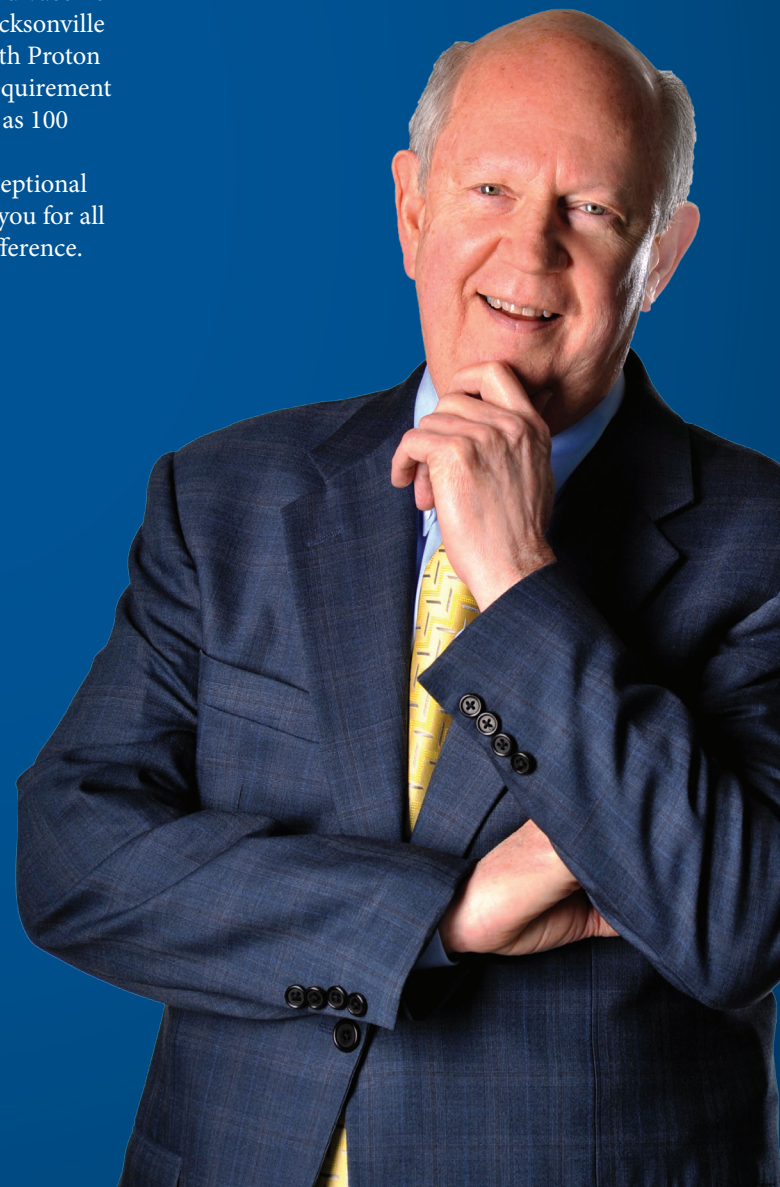
I also want to remind you to get your flu vaccine by Oct. 31. The flu vaccine is mandatory for all UF Health Jacksonville, University of Florida Jacksonville Physicians Inc., UF College of Medicine – Jacksonville and UF Health Proton Therapy Institute employees. You can find more details about this requirement on the Bridge. If you’re a GatorCare member, the flu vaccine counts as 100 points toward your annual wellness credit.

As always, it is an honor and privilege to be your CEO. It’s the exceptional care you provide that makes an impact in our patients’ lives. Thank you for all of your efforts and the work you do every day — it truly makes a difference.

Sincerely,



Russell E. Armistead, MBA
CEO, UF Health Jacksonville



OCT. 12 – 31

UF Health Jacksonville Annual Open Enrollment



Open enrollment is the only time of year employees can make changes to benefits without a qualifying event. Select your benefit elections for the 2023 plan year by clicking on the “PeopleSoft HR Self Service” link under the “Employee Services” drop-down menu on the Bridge. Changes made during open enrollment will be effective Jan. 1, 2023.

More information about the 2023 benefits plan is available on the Bridge. Please note, this is for UF Health Jacksonville employees only. If you have questions, email MyBenefits@jax.ufl.edu or call the UF Health Jacksonville Benefits Department at 904.244.9610.



UF HEALTH BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

Month Events

The C.A.R.E. Expo (Cancer Assistance, Resources and Expertise)

Saturday, Oct. 15, from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. / Riverfront Plaza
Contact Faith.Higgins@jax.ufl.edu for more information.

Pink Table Tour

Tuesday, Oct. 25 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. / UF Health Rehabilitation – Wildlight
Join us for a free educational and interactive tour about breast cancer, all on one pink table. Contact Faith.Higgins@jax.ufl.edu for more information.

Think Pink Day

Monday, Oct. 17
Annual employee mammograms
Call 383.1024 today to schedule your appointment at one of our five convenient breast imaging locations. Visit UFHealthJax.org/womens-imaging to learn more.

“Life Interrupted: Telling Breast Cancer Stories”

Wednesday, Oct. 19, from 5 – 7 p.m. / UF Health Jacksonville
Community film screening and discussion event with a virtual joining option. Contact Faith.Higgins@jax.ufl.edu for more information.

Making Strides of the First Coast

By the American Cancer Society
Saturday, Oct. 22, at 9 a.m.
Visit UFHealthJax.org/breastcancerwalk to join the UF Health Jacksonville team.



◀ Vonceil Bradford had a special photoshoot done to celebrate being cancer-free.

Photo credit: Faith Bradley

FINDING *the* STRENGTH *to* FIGHT

BY SARAH LE

▶ Vonceil's family and friends supported her by shaving her head prior to starting treatment.



A young pharmacy student undergoes breast cancer treatment during the pandemic.

Life throws curveballs when we least expect them. Vonceil Bradford knows this firsthand. In 2019, she was interning, attending pharmacy school in Tallahassee, Florida, and raising two beautiful daughters. She had already overcome many challenges in her 29 years of life. But unbeknownst to Bradford, she had another one to overcome — breast cancer.

Advocating for your health

In 2019, during Bradford's fall semester in school, she was feeling more tired than usual. After learning more about breast cancer in one of her classes, Bradford examined her own breasts and found a small lump. She visited a doctor, where they told Bradford to continue monitoring it.

Two months later, the lump had grown from the size of a pecan to that of a golf ball. Bradford's breast became enlarged, and the lump was painful to touch, prompting her to go to the emergency room. Initial scans didn't show cancer, but Bradford wanted a second opinion and returned to her hometown of Jacksonville, Florida. After imaging and biopsy, she was diagnosed with cancer in both breasts.

Seeking treatment at UF Health

Bradford was battling with her emotions and fears as she struggled to figure out the next steps. After speaking with a close friend and former patient, Bradford made the decision to seek care at UF Health Jacksonville with Bharti Jasra, MD, a breast surgical oncologist at the UF Health Breast Center – Jacksonville.

Despite being out of the country, Jasra responded quickly to get the process moving and set up appointments. At UF Health Jacksonville, doctors work together on complicated cases to give patients the full spectrum of comprehensive care needed for success. Jasra assembled a team of specialists and created a personalized treatment plan for Bradford. The team included various specialties, such as medical oncology, plastic surgery, genetic counseling, physical therapy and radiation.

"They showed me that I was a priority to them," Bradford said. "I got to UF Health Jacksonville at the beginning of December, and by the following week, Dr. Jasra had created an entire team for me."

Bradford met with medical oncologist Jason Hew, MD, who reviewed her breast imaging and confirmed the cancer diagnosis in both breasts, with one breast having more advanced cancer than the other. They determined the best course of action was neoadjuvant chemotherapy, which would help reduce the tumor before surgically removing it. A port was surgically placed to help deliver the chemotherapy drugs.

Leaning on friends and family

Bradford withdrew from school and relocated to Jacksonville for her cancer treatments. She decided to throw a party surrounded by her friends and family, at which she shaved her hair. It was a moment of solidarity and encouragement.

"If I could give any advice, it would be to kick-start your journey with a head-shaving party," Bradford said. "Family and friends reassured me that we would get through this together."

Bradford began chemotherapy treatments in January 2020, and she went to them every other week through March. Throughout all of this, her friends and family were there to help by caring for her daughters and providing emotional support.

Overcoming challenges along the way

Genetic testing revealed Bradford had the BRCA2 gene. Patients with this gene have a high risk of developing a second breast cancer in the future after treatment of the first cancer. For a young woman like Bradford, the best recommended course of action following chemotherapy was a bilateral mastectomy — or the removal of both breasts. Bradford was distraught at this news but continued to lean on her support system and the team at UF Health Jacksonville.

The surgery was scheduled for May 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this challenge, Bradford's treatments and surgery were not affected, and everything went smoothly. Jasra successfully removed the cancer and performed a sentinel lymph node biopsy to confirm the cancer had not spread. After that, John Murray, MD, a plastic surgeon at UF Health Jacksonville, completed the breast reconstruction portion of the surgery.

"It was difficult to see [Vonceil] go through everything, but she was very brave, very bold, and she accepted all of the challenges that came with the cancer diagnosis and treatment involved," Jasra said.

Recovering and returning to life

Thankfully, Bradford's cancer responded well to the chemotherapy treatment, and the bilateral mastectomy was a success. Following surgery, she spent time recovering and receiving physical therapy. Bradford continues to see Hew and takes medication to help prevent the cancer from returning.

"The process wouldn't have gone as smoothly as it did without Dr. Jasra and the team she created for me," Bradford said.

In August 2020, Bradford returned to pharmacy school, shortly after finishing her cancer treatments. Bradford was hesitant, but Jasra encouraged her and even helped with getting the accommodations she needed, such as remote learning and extra time to take tests and complete assignments. Today, she is on schedule to graduate from Florida A&M University's College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in May 2023.

Despite the physically and emotionally taxing journey, Bradford found the strength to make it through and is forever grateful to UF Health Jacksonville for giving her another chance at life. Today, she wants to encourage and inspire other women like her who are battling breast cancer and remind them that there is hope for healing.

"There isn't enough money in the world to repay them for what they've done — and for the love and care they've given me," Bradford said.

ONGOING DISPARITIES IN BREAST CANCER PATIENT OUTCOMES

BY SHAHLA MASOOD, MD

A call to action to improve breast cancer outcomes for African American women.

The recent decline in breast cancer mortality rates around the world is attributed to an increase in patient education, advances in breast imaging and screening, and breast cancer therapy innovations. The emerging discoveries about the biology of this disease and the introduction of molecular targeted therapy (a treatment to target specific molecules to destroy cancer cells or to slow their growth) could potentially further reduce breast cancer mortality. Despite all the advances made, early breast cancer detection, treatment and control have not equally benefited all patient populations. Breast cancer patients who are African American suffer from a higher mortality rate compared with their white counterparts in the United States.

Higher mortality rates

Breast cancer is still the second-leading cause of cancer death among African American women, with 40% more likely to die from it than white women in the U.S. and other world regions. The incidence of breast cancer in African American women is continuously increasing, while there is no marked decrease in mortality trends. Another disparity is the age factor for African American women — they are more likely to get breast cancer at a younger age. In addition, they are more likely to present at a later stage of the disease at diagnosis than white women. These factors show African Americans lag behind the progress made in breast cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment, causing these patients to continue to suffer disproportionately from this disease.

Risk factors for breast cancer

Several recent studies have focused on identifying factors that may contribute to the current disparities. Socioeconomic status, access to care and late-stage presentation have been considered as a few reasons why African American breast cancer patients experience poor outcomes. Breast cancer is often associated with aggressive cancer subtypes, such as triple-negative breast cancer, which lacks three markers associated with breast cancer:

estrogen, progesterone and human epidermal growth factor receptors. As a result, the biology of individual breast cancer cases among African American patients has been considered as one of the predisposing factors for poor outcomes. These observations suggest a critical need for comprehensive genomic analysis of breast cancer among African Americans vs. white patients to better understand the distinct genomic profile in different ethnic groups. Another measure to increase understanding is encouraging African American breast cancer patients to enroll in clinical trials to benefit from the opportunities of new discoveries.

Removing barriers to care

The National Academy of Medicine recognizes the breast cancer disparities among African Americans and recommends a multilevel approach to either eliminate or reduce disparities. This can be accomplished by removing key barriers to care.

- Develop effective programs to increase public breast health education on important topics. These topics include behavioral lifestyle changes, such as diet, exercise and reducing stress, as well as which preventive health screenings are required to identify breast cancer early.
- Establish effective follow-up measures for recommended tests following initial screenings. These may include letters, phone calls and digital communications.
- Increase equitable access to care for all patients. Access barriers may include transportation, hours of operation and finances.

The implementation of community-centered and team-based approaches to care has also shown promise in reducing local breast cancer disparities. Leveraging the advances in breast cancer screenings and therapies to reach and educate African American women — and providing easier and more equitable access to health care — will make a difference in outcomes for African American breast cancer patients.

GRADUATING IN STYLE

BY SHRUTHI SRINIVASAN

UF Health JaxHATS program assists patients with disabilities and special health care needs.

The Jacksonville Health and Transition Services, or JaxHATS, program at UF Health Jacksonville was created to help teens and young adults with disabilities or special health care needs transition from pediatric to adult-oriented health care.

The program serves patients ages 13 to 23 by educating them on medication management, health insurance, vocational rehabilitation opportunities and more. The goal is to help patients feel ready to take on the world against all odds with the untethering support of the clinic and their family members.

About six months to a year before a patient's 23rd birthday, staff members begin preparing them to transfer from our clinic to an adult primary care provider. The JaxHATS staff members play an important role in the transition and help create a unique experience for each patient.

Providing Comprehensive Care

Each year, JaxHATS celebrates the patients in their program who are graduating from high school or college to mark this notable milestone in their lives. During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented patients from receiving the graduation they deserved, so the JaxHATS team organized a graduation drive-up event. Staff members traveled to each patient's home and celebrated with music, posters and decorations. This started a new annual tradition, and now they celebrate graduating JaxHATS patients every year.

This past June, the JaxHATS team members hopped in their cars to celebrate the 2022 graduates. Each graduate received a JaxHATS certificate of accomplishment and graduation love, and they even got to choose their own song as staff drove up to their house. The graduates and their families celebrated the exciting milestone by taking photos and dancing.

"Our patients face so many complex medical challenges and graduating is a testament of their resilience, so we want to celebrate that accomplishment," said Chanda Jones, a case coordinator with the UF Health JaxHATS program.

This event is just one example of the comprehensive care JaxHATS staff provides to their patients. [Learn more about the JaxHATS program at UFHJax.org/jaxhats](https://UFHJax.org/jaxhats).



2022 JaxHATS graduates celebrate during the drive-up graduation.

OL

OPENLINES

NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

February 2023: Nov. 15, 2022

March 2023: Dec. 15, 2022

April 2023: Jan. 15, 2022

May 2023: Feb. 15, 2022

Submit your copy and photos via
email to **openlines@jax.ufl.edu**.

EDITOR

Sarah Le

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Darcy Ladd

PHOTOGRAPHY

Faith Bradley

Nelson Keefer

CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Le

Shahla Masood, MD

Shruthi Srinivasan

UFHealth
JACKSONVILLE

UFHealthJax.org

PHOTO SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

We welcome photos that are taken or submitted by employees. Photos should be at least 3 megabytes (3MB) in image size to be published. Please try to take or submit photos that are clear (camera is held very still); not backlit (flash is used and/or light source is not behind the subject); and framed correctly (feet are not cut off and/or subject is not shown too far away). Employees are encouraged to arrange photography with the Media Center before an event to ensure quality. **Direct questions to openlines@jax.ufl.edu or call 244.9750.**

Visit OpenLines.UFHealthJax.org to find current and past issues of Open Lines.